

PASTORAL *Links*



Christian
Health Care
Center

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“The Knee Bone’s Connected...”

By Rev. Jim Knol
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The bones of the skeleton are all connected, the old spiritual reminds us. Knee, thigh, hip, back bones... they’re all instrumental to each other’s purpose.

Whether that well-loved song is a reference to the vision in Ezekiel 13 or to the apostle Paul’s reference to the body in 1 Corinthians 12, it represents a basic premise of *Pastoral Links*, i.e. the church is at its best when it is strongly linked. By extension, clergy are better able to be pastoral care-givers when the connection between them is supportive.

Pastoral Links was established as a vehicle to encourage conversation around current pastoral-care themes. The articles provided address the concerns we hear from area clergy. We invite your responses – either by written note or e-mail, which can (with your permission) then be shared in future issues.

It is often through our connection that we find God’s word of inspiration. “Hear the word of the Lord.” It may come from someone we don’t know, or from a tradition that is not ours. Those words may challenge, inspire, or convict us, but they must be heard. We are pastoral care-givers linked by a common concern – to help those in need. Now, let us listen for the word of the Lord.

Troubled Congregants, Sleepless Nights

By Richard Roukema, MD

In every congregation there are strong, committed, active members, some of whom are living with emotional and mental illness. Recognition of this reality does not always make it easy to help those in distress.

Congregants with mild anxiety, depression, or other emotional problems generally do not cause distress for clergy. When these illnesses are extreme, they may be difficult to help. This is especially true of personality disorders.

One of your flock is burdened with constant suspicion, another with surprising enthusiasm but little follow through. Others may be overly dependent and demand an excessive amount of your time. Some are withdrawn, quiet, yet not depressed. A few are given to extreme emotional outbursts in response to insignificant issues. Such congregants take up enormous time and attention and may give you sleepless nights.

Although not always possible to help, your involvement and understanding of the individual personality problems may determine how effective you may be in your work with them.

A basic knowledge of personality disorders is essential to deal effectively with folks in your congregation suffering from these disorders. A pastor told me the following. He was upset with a parishioner who agreed to perform a task in the church which required some preparation and a report on his progress at the next meeting. At first, he excused himself by saying he had little time to complete his assignment. But at the fourth meeting, he was running out of excuses. Yet he was always pleasant and assured the group that he would complete the work.

The pastor, facing a deadline was becoming increasingly exasperated by the delay. The pastor discussed the problem with me. I identified this issue as an example of passive-obstruction. It can be seen in childhood when a mother asks a young boy to perform a household task. He willingly agrees, but postpones the task endlessly. If this pattern is prolonged into adult life, it may become a personality disorder.

It is our intent to discuss personality disorders more fully in subsequent issues of *Pastoral Links*. We are hopeful that you find the discussion of these personalities useful.

The Critical-Demanding Person

By Rev. Michael Avila, DMin

Church Relations Coordinator

Chaplain, The Longview Assisted Living Residence and Hillcrest Residence

Difficult people are all around us. They can argue with us and avoid us; they talk about us and challenge us; they ask for our help then refuse to receive it; they can criticize us for what we don't do and yet find a reason to complain about what we do.

One of the personality types we may find in our congregations is the critical-demanding person. These type of people can be provocative, argumentative, deceptive, and manipulative. They are overly conscientious and are always looking for something or someone to criticize. They are preoccupied with achieving perfection and they will not hesitate to point out your mistakes. The standards they set for themselves and others are unrealistic and unattainable. These people live with the basic belief that there is no room for error. If an error does occur they will avoid taking responsibility and find fault with everything and everyone else.

Our thoughtful response is to remember that we can trust and believe that, on some

level, the critical-demanding person wants to get along and do what's right. As the leader you can take the initiative to move toward the person rather than avoiding him or her. Remember that when someone is making demands or expressing criticism, he or she is trying to tell you something about himself or herself. He/she is expressing a pastoral need, a spiritual concern, that leaves him/her more troubled than usual. This means we are invited to listen for the common ground on which a dialog may ensue. Remain open to his/her vulnerabilities and to what you might learn through this experience to strengthen your character and nurture your spirit.

When people frustrate us and get on our nerves, we are quick to think that the solution is for them to change. In dealing with those critical-demanding people in our world, we begin to change when we give up the hope that others will change. We cope with difficult people more effectively when we learn they make use of a critical-

demanding personality in order to defend against an experience of fear and anxiety that has hovered like a plague over their entire lives. As we bear witness to the wounds and scars of those to whom we minister, the wounds and scars of our own damaged spirits begin to be revealed.

This is not the whole story, but a beginning. In learning how to relate to others, the difficult, the critical and demanding, we can see that the key in negotiating the troubled waters of these painful experiences comes in our willingness to know ourselves. As we set limits and eliminate our own harmful behavior, we can begin to clarify expectations as we move in the direction of focusing on solutions rather than problems. In time, as we come to understand the vulnerabilities we ourselves bring to relationships, we can heal those relationships and begin to build bridges to each other. Then, perhaps, we can see that the difficult people we struggle to understand are some of the same dedicated people we are called to serve.

About Christian Health Care Center

Christian Health Care Center (CHCC) was founded in 1911 by a group of deacons from the Reformed tradition. Today, CHCC – a non-profit organization open to anyone regardless of race, sex, or religion – provides a continuum of high-quality, family-centered elder-care and mental-health services in a compassionate and loving environment consistent with the Christian principles on which the institution was founded. Elder-care services include Heritage Manor, a 252-bed nursing home; Southgate, a special-care, 40-bed, inpatient nursing facility offering behavioral-management treatment; The Longview, an assisted-living facility for 92 residents; Christian Health Care Adult Day Services of Wayne and Wyckoff; Hillcrest

Residence, a supportive home for 39 seniors; and Evergreen Court, a complex of 40 apartments for independent seniors. Mental-health services include Ramapo Ridge Psychiatric Hospital, a full-service, 46-bed inpatient hospital for adult and geriatric patients, and its outpatient mental-health service, Christian Health Care Counseling Center; Advent Counseling Centers, which are affiliated with the Center and located in New Providence and Somerset; and Pathways, a partial-hospitalization program to treat adults who experience both a developmental disability and a co-existing psychiatric disorder.

For more information about the Center and its programs, call (201) 848-5200.